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Misery takes Possession of the

Land.

bodies were left lying one upon another till they stank, so that many women in the neighbourhood ran away, leaving their children behind them to die of hunger. Afterwards the said duke massacred another 4,000, and then marched straight off to where another band of them was in revolt, so that we may soon look forward to seeing perfect quiet established all along the Rhine." "The villages stand empty," notes Margrave Ernest of Baden, "the poor women and children are taking to flight, and there is great misery and lamentations." "There is no end to the chopping off of heads," says Spalatin. "The number of widows and orphans is growing preposterously large."

Misery indeed took possession of the land, for not only were 100,000 peasants butchered, at the lowest computation (the Bishop of Spires mentions 150,000), but many thousands more sought safety in flight across the Swiss border, and into other lands far and near. The misery was increased by the insensate vengeance that would not discriminate between the guilty and the innocent "No matter," wrote a burgher of Rotenburg, "whether a peasant or a burgher be innocent, he has to pay indemnity to the League all the same. Several of my peasants who had nothing to do with the insurrection have already been burnt to death." "The very stones," says Cochlaeus, "might be moved to pity by so much misery and poverty."

Ultimately, it began to dawn on these savage repressors that this frenzy of revenge had gone too far, even from the point of view of self-interest. It occurred to them that after all they could not dispense with these rebellious peasants, and that they had better leave a remnant to cultivate their domains for them. "If all our peasants are put to death in this manner!" remonstrated Margrave George to his brother Casimir, "where shall we find others to grow our food?" From motives of self-interest, therefore, if not of humanity, the gruesome drama came at last to an end. But what an ending for the common man! Not only was his lot unspeakably wretched for the time being, all hope of any improvement of his status was dashed for centuries. Before him was a chaos of despair, and the shock to his faith in a new age made him a pessimist, a sceptic. "Why preaches the parson of